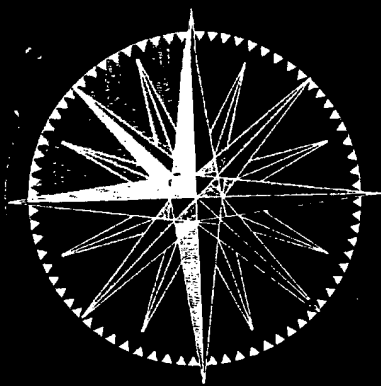


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17 July 1964

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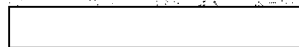
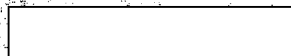
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DATE: OCT 2002

CHINESE AIR DEFENSE CAPABILITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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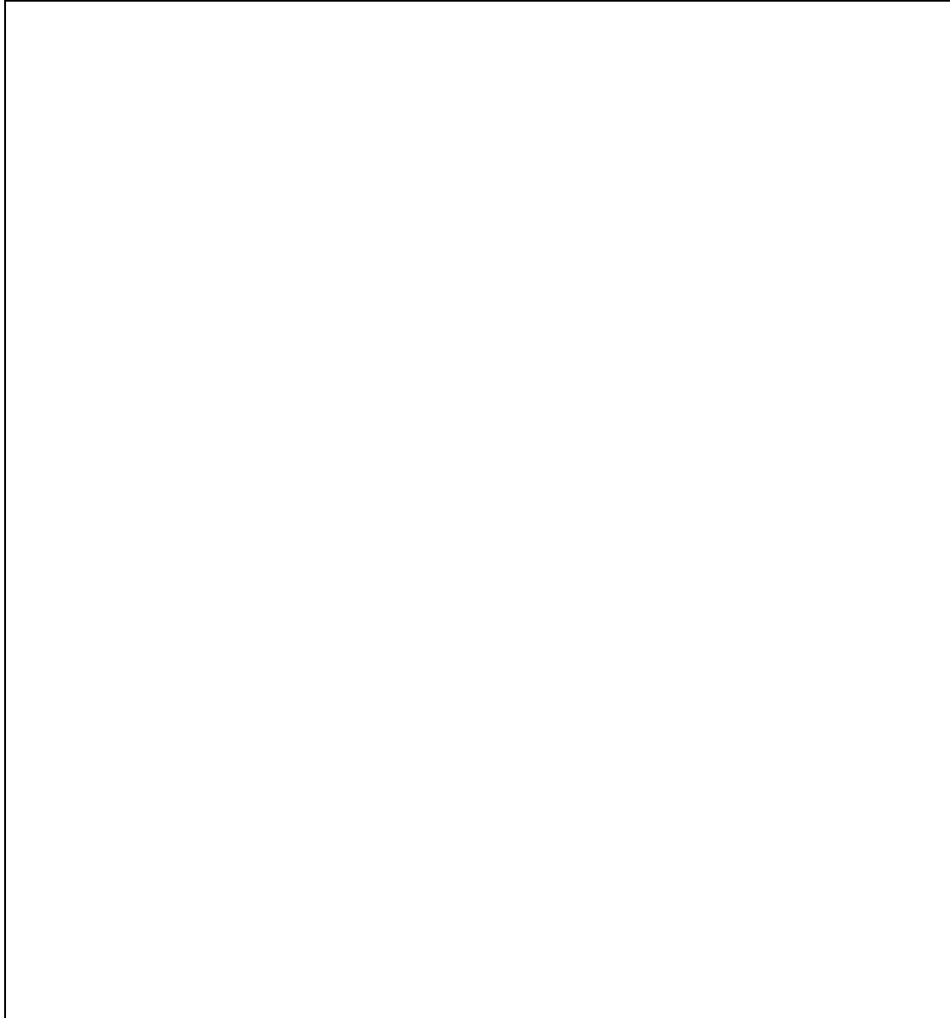
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17 July 1964

CHINESE AIR DEFENSE CAPABILITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Recent top-level conferences between the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists probably concerned actions to be taken to defend Communist-dominated parts of Southeast Asia against air attack. There may also have been some discussion of what countermeasures might be taken against the recently increased anti-Communist air activity in Laos, including both the Laotian T-28 strikes and US photoreconnaissance missions. North Vietnam, which has no tactical air force, may obtain some air support from Communist China. There is no evidence to suggest that a movement of jet aircraft is imminent, but a recent statement by Chinese Communist Foreign Minister Chen Yi put the US on notice that it could expect Chinese countermoves if it attacked North Vietnam. For the moment, both the Pathet Lao and Viet Cong are improving their air defenses primarily by introducing more and better antiaircraft weapons for use against low-flying aircraft.

North Vietnam

Hanoi, prohibited from acquiring an air force under the terms of the 1954 Geneva Accords, has nevertheless developed a limited air defense capability. An early warning radar system begun in 1957 now has about 21 stations providing information to air defense headquarters in Hanoi. The network's coverage extends as far west as eastern Thailand, as far south as the 15th parallel, and as far east as Hainan Island. The equipment, with the exception of one, possibly two, Flatface radars near Hanoi, is limited to early-model radars produced in China and the USSR, and is woefully deficient in establishing target altitudes.

Active defense against hostile aircraft depends upon a

wide assortment of light and medium antiaircraft artillery (AAA). Most of this equipment dates from World War II, but some relatively modern 57-mm. guns may have been added in recent years. The medium AAA (85-mm., 88-mm., and 90-mm.), primarily used to defend critical targets such as urban areas, has an effective vertical range of about 30,000 feet.

Since last February, the Vietnamese air defense organization has been on a greatly increased combat alert. A new "command post" has been established to tighten control over artillery units in the populous Red River Delta area.

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[] been accompanied by efforts to prepare the public psychologically against air attacks. A special party conference on the "People's Air Defenses" was convened in late June.

Although North Vietnam has no combat aircraft, the foundations for the creation of an air arm have been laid. Vietnamese pilots have been operating a country-wide civil transport fleet since about 1956. An air command and administrative organ, which probably directs long-term development plans, has been in existence since at least mid-1959.

North Vietnamese air capabilities received a tremendous boost during the Soviet airlift into Laos, which began in late 1960 and extended through October 1962. During this period runways were improved, POL and cargo storage areas were expanded, and facilities were provided for loading and unloading, maintenance, and communications. When the airlift ended, enough aircraft were left behind to more than double Hanoi's inventory.

A large number of airfields inherited from the French have been improved and enlarged over the years. About 20 now are serviceable, including at least three in the Hanoi-Haiphong area that are considered capable of supporting limited jet fighter operations.

A modern airfield with an 8,700-foot runway has been under construction with Chinese super-

vision since early 1962 at Phuc Yen near Hanoi. The field apparently is intended to serve as a principal international air terminal, but it is capable of handling almost all types of military aircraft. Civilian aircraft, including Chinese turbo-prop jet transports, have been using it since 26 June, although some fueling, maintenance, and electronics facilities are not quite completed.

Aside from the actual acquisition of aircraft, the lack of training facilities poses the most serious obstacle to the development of an indigenous air force. Only basic flight training can be provided in North Vietnam, and for that only about 15 YAK-18 (Max) piston-engine aircraft are available. There have been consistent low-level reports that Vietnamese pilots are receiving advanced flight training in China, the Eastern European satellites, and, lately, in the Soviet Union. Thus far, however, only the training of civilian pilots in China has been confirmed.

As long as North Vietnam lacks a fighter capability it will remain extremely vulnerable to air attack. It will have to rely upon fighter aircraft based in southwest China to make up the deficit.

Communist China

Peiping's first moves to develop its air power in southwest China came in 1960, when it created an air defense district coinciding roughly with the Kunming Military Region, established an early warning radar network, and moved one

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regiment of jet fighters to Kunming. (A regiment is equivalent to a US Air Force squadron of 25-30 planes.) Little more was done until the late summer of 1963. Then, following a tour by North Vietnamese military figures in China in June, an additional regiment of jet fighters was deployed to a new airfield at Mengtzu, about 45 miles north of the North Vietnamese border.

At about the same time, Peiping began closing the radar gap in western south China. Since late 1963, four radar stations have been moved closer to the Sino-Vietnamese border and equipped with the latest Chinese long-range early warning radar. A ground control intercept (GCI) station was added early this year to guide fighter aircraft to their targets.

Since the regiment was added at Mengtzu, there have been about 185 jet fighters in the area. Early warning and GCI control are provided by a radar net of some 37 stations within 200 miles of the Vietnamese border. Flight operations can be conducted from five first-line airfields and several backup bases in the Kunming area and in south China.

This gives the Chinese a good capability to detect, track, and undertake timely defensive measures against daylight penetrations in clear weather by small numbers of subsonic aircraft along the Sino-Laos and Sino-Vietnamese border. Their capability to handle greater numbers of intruders would vary with the number of GCI controllers and interceptor aircraft

assigned to this area. The current paucity of GCI stations, especially west of Nanning, suggests that large-scale air attacks would quickly saturate Chinese defenses.

Against a manned, subsonic bomber threat at medium altitudes the Chinese Communist jet fighter aircraft would probably be effective during the day under good flying conditions. Against supersonic threat such as the B-58, intercept would be limited to the MIG-21 (Fishbed) and even then would be marginal. Night penetration would probably go largely unmolested because of the limited number of airborne radar-equipped interceptors currently operating in south China. Weapons effectiveness at very low and very high altitudes would also be limited.

Chinese jet fighters staged from forward bases such as Mengtzu could operate over major portions of Laos and North Vietnam as well as some areas of Burma and Thailand. Their effectiveness, however, would probably be marginal unless pilot training is greatly improved. At present, for example, jet pilots assigned to first-rate units are evidently not receiving adequate flight training to maintain the high standards of proficiency which would be necessary to engage a modern air force.

Air defenses in the south China area could be expanded at any time, but there are several limiting factors. Of the five

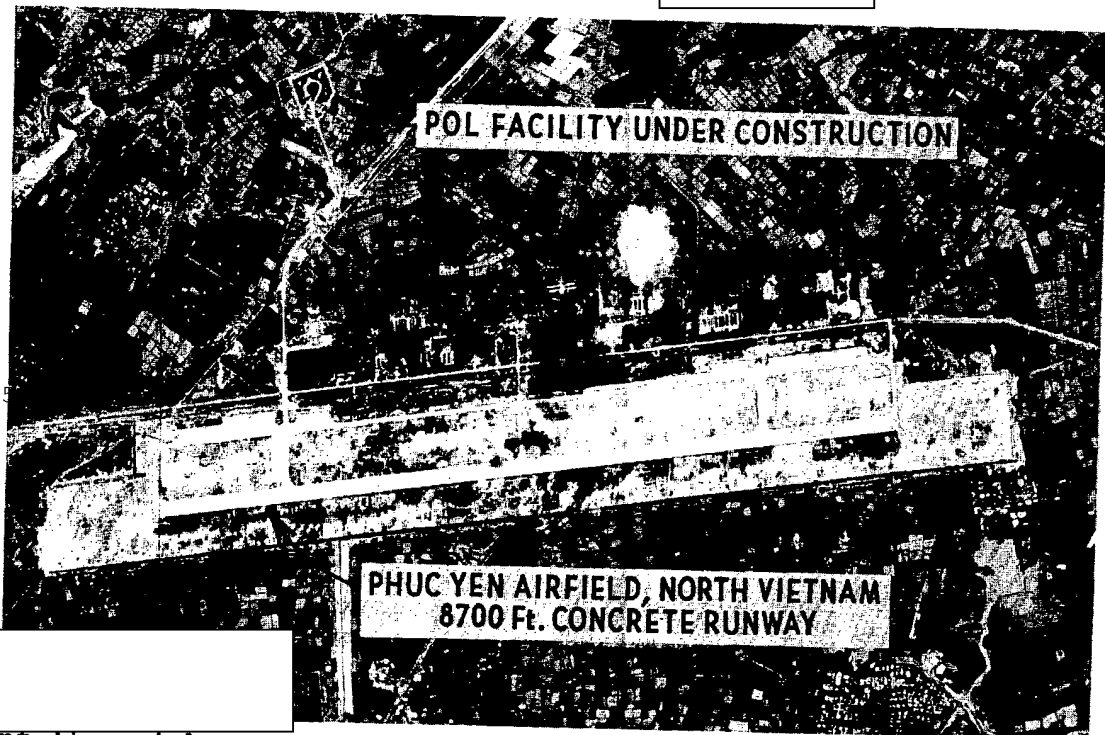
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front-line airbases only Nanning remains unoccupied, and few other airfields in the forward area could be converted readily to tactical use. The deployment of additional units to secondary bases in the southwest China district would probably strain China's logistic facilities. All bulk items destined for that area, such as aircraft POL supplies, must be brought in over a circuitous single-track rail line that runs through North Vietnam.

Chinese - North Vietnamese
Air Defense Cooperation

No link has been detected between the air defense systems of China and North Vietnam, but the development of such a link seems likely in view of the general trend toward closer political and military cooperation.

Recent US threats have probably given an increased urgency to plans

for air defense cooperation, at least to the extent of exchanging early warning information. Such cooperation may be an important topic of the high-level talks between Peiping and Hanoi that apparently have been under way since 20 June. Sino-Vietnamese consultations, more restricted in scope and importance, apparently took place last summer prior to the deployment of jet fighters to Mengtzu.

Contingency plans have probably been made for the use of Chinese aircraft over North Vietnam should the situation warrant such a move. Steps may have been taken to facilitate the movement of jet aircraft into North Vietnam on short notice if military operations are extended to North Vietnam.

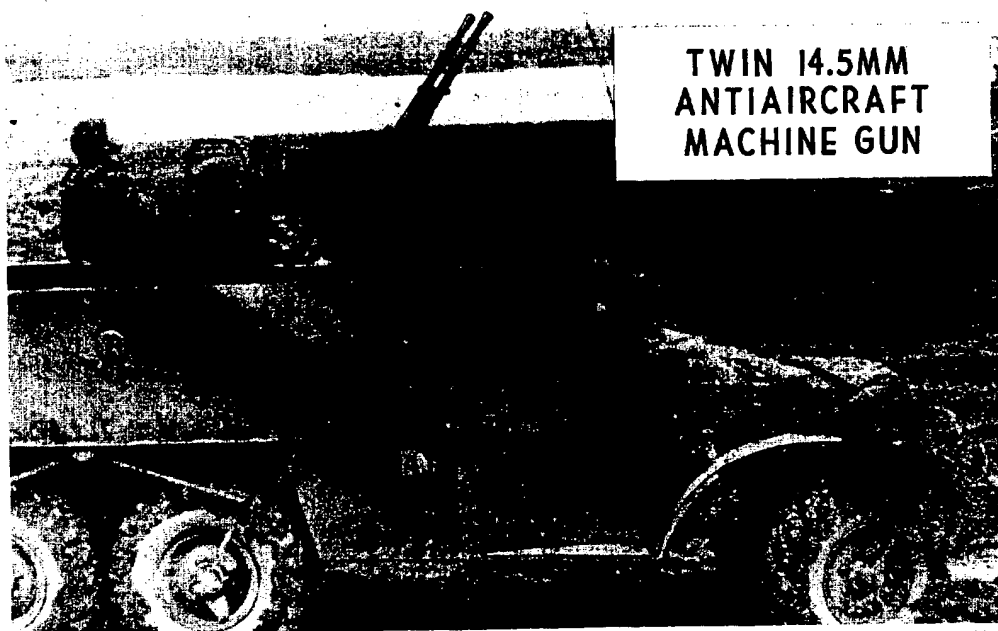
Jet fuel storage facilities are near completion at the new airfield at Phuc Yen, but there is still no sign of the developments

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which would probably precede the introduction of jets. These include the establishment of GCI radar sites, the activation of military flight service and fighter operations

and direct participation of Chinese-speaking personnel in the North Vietnamese air defense system.

Before deciding to send jets, Communist China might supply North Vietnam with a limited retaliatory tactical air capability, such as suitable piston-engine, ground-attack aircraft.

Laos and South Vietnam

The effectiveness of Communist air defenses in South Vietnam, and to a lesser extent in Laos, stems from the nature of the terrain and the kind of war that is being fought there. Guerrilla units operate in heavily forested areas and can be detected only from low altitudes where attacking aircraft are vulnerable to small-arms ground fire.

Pathet Lao air defenses have undergone a significant expansion in recent months. Fifty 37-mm. antiaircraft artillery guns, many equipped with gun-laying radar, have been firmly identified in photography of central and southern Laos since mid-May. Ground observers reported the movement of truck-mounted 14.5-mm. antiaircraft machine guns from North Vietnam

into Laos last month.

Two US jets were downed over this area last month and many Laotian air force T-28s have received some flak damage.

In South Vietnam, the Hanoi-directed Viet Cong have devised tactics to counter the government's increased use of air support. Large-caliber machine guns have been equipped with special mounts and gun sights, and guerrilla units are receiving training in antiaircraft techniques. Last year the Viet Cong scored ten times as many hits on government aircraft as they had in the previous year.

In the light of continuing T-28 activity against the Pathet Lao by the Laotian Air Force, the Pathet Lao will probably continue to improve their defensive capability through the acquisition of additional antiaircraft artillery and fire-control radar from North Vietnam. The Viet Cong have substantially improved their capabilities against low-flying aircraft and helicopters, and they too will undoubtedly receive increasing quantities of light mobile automatic weapons which will further improve their effectiveness.

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